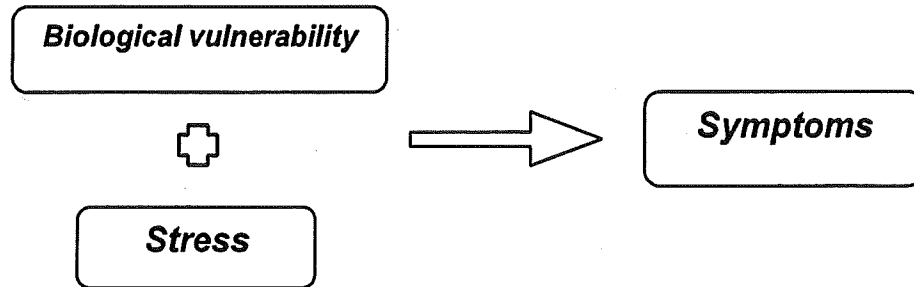


Stress-Vulnerability Model



According to the stress-vulnerability model, psychiatric illnesses have a biological basis. This biological basis or vulnerability can be made worse by stress and substance use, but can be improved by medication and by leading a healthy lifestyle. The stress-vulnerability model can help you understand what influences the disorder and how the effects of the disorder can be minimized.

- Both stress and biological vulnerability contribute to symptoms

What is biological vulnerability?

The term "biological vulnerability" refers to people who are born with, or who acquire very early in life, a tendency to develop a problem in a specific medical area.

- Scientists believe that the symptoms are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.
- Some people have a biological vulnerability to develop psychosis.
- As with other disorders, such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, genetic factors play a role in the vulnerability to psychosis. The chances of a person developing psychosis are higher if a close relative also has a psychiatric disorder.
- Alcohol and drug use may trigger symptoms or make them worse.

Questions:

- Are you aware of any biological factors in your family for any medical problems? What about for psychiatric problems?

- Has anyone in your family struggled with drugs or alcohol? Has the relative in NAVIGATE had any experience with drugs or alcohol related to his/her symptoms?

What are stress factors?

- Stress can trigger the onset of symptoms or make them worse.
- Family relationships can sometimes be stressful.
- How people experience stress is very individual. In fact, what is stressful to one person may not be stressful at all to someone else. For example, some people love roller coasters and others avoid them at any cost.
- There is no such thing as a stress-free life, so you can't avoid all stress. But it is helpful to be aware of times when a person is under stress and to learn strategies for coping with it effectively.
- We will present ways to prevent stress and cope more effectively with stress in the Just the Facts-Coping with Stress Handout.

Question:

- Have there been times anyone noticed the relative in NAVIGATE being under more stress? Did that seem related to symptoms? What are the stressful situations in your family?

A Few Words about Substance Use

Drugs and alcohol can worsen biological vulnerabilities to develop psychosis. However, we would not say the drugs "caused" the illnesses. Many people use drugs and alcohol and never develop psychosis. However, if a person has a tendency to develop psychosis (usually unknown to him or her) drugs and alcohol can bring it out.

What can family members or the relative in NAVIGATE do to decrease his/her biological vulnerability and stress factors?

Because both biological vulnerability and stress contribute to symptoms, treatment for psychiatric symptoms needs to address both of these factors.

Things people can do to influence the biological vulnerability factor of psychosis:

- Take medication as prescribed
- Avoid street drugs and alcohol
- Take care of physical health

Questions:

- Have medications helped the relative in NAVIGATE to reduce symptoms?
- Has avoiding (or decreasing) drug and alcohol use helped the relative in NAVIGATE to reduce symptoms?

Things people can do to influence the stress factor of psychosis:

- Engage in meaningful activities
- Develop relationships with supportive people
- Learn strategies for managing stress
- Keep family conflict low
- Develop coping strategies for persistent symptoms

Question:

- What does the relative in NAVIGATE do to reduce stress?
- How do other family members help?